

XIII. PROTECTED SPECIES INTERACTIONS

Marine mammals, smalltooth sawfish, and sea turtles are all protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and/or the Endangered Species Act. Fishermen are prohibited from taking or harassing these animals and must follow certain requirements if one of these animals is incidentally caught or entangled in fishing gear. Pelagic longline, bottom longline, and gillnet vessels have specific actions and gear they are required to use to avoid interactions and release these animals if they are caught. For more information specific to those gears, see the appropriate section above.

MARINE MAMMALS

Pelagic longline fishermen are required to abide by the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan regulations. These regulations are aimed at reducing interactions with long- and short-finned pilot whales and Risso's dolphins. The Plan includes a variety of regulations including a maximum mainline length of 20 nmi for all pelagic longline sets within the Mid-Atlantic Bight region and a requirement for all vessels fishing within the Cape Hatteras Special Research Area to be able to carry observers, participate in NOAA Fisheries-approved research, and maintain daily communications with other local vessel captains.²²⁸ For additional information on the Pelagic Longline Take Reduction Plan, see <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/interactions/trt/pl-trt.htm>

For large whales caught alive or dead and on the line, immediately contact the Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network Hotline at: (800) 600-3622 or USCG VHF Channel 16 for instructions.

For small marine mammals, gently bring the mammal alongside the vessel and work the tangle off the mammal as quickly as possible. When a small marine mammal is hooked, if possible, cut off the barb of the hook with long handled bolt cutters, and then cut the line as close to the hook as possible. Do not use a tether, ninja sticks, or other devices designed for sea turtle dehooking or disentangling to control the animal. Marine mammal entanglements must be reported to NOAA Fisheries within 48 hours after the end of the trip. The reporting form is available from the Office of Protected Resources at (301) 713-2322 or at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/pdfs/interactions/mmap_reporting_form.pdf.

SMALLTOOTH SAWFISH

All smalltooth sawfish must be released in a manner that will ensure maximum probability of survival, but without removing the fish from the water or any research tags from the fish. While attempting to dehook a smalltooth sawfish, the fish should be kept in the water while maintaining water flow over the gills and examined for research tags.²²⁹ The animal should not be dehooked if the hook is in the rostrum; if the animal cannot be dehooked, cut the line as close to the hook as possible. If caught in a gillnet, smalltooth sawfish should not be removed from the water while removing from the gillnet.²³⁰

SEA TURTLES

Longline and gillnet vessels must possess and use sea turtle handling and release gear in compliance with NOAA Fisheries' careful release protocols. The required handling and release gears are fully described in the document titled "NMFS Approved Models for Equipment needed for the Careful Release of Sea Turtles Caught in Hook and Line Fisheries." The list of approved models of required gear is available on the HMS Management Division website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/> and upon request from the HMS St. Petersburg Office. Also, a Technical Memorandum (NMFS-SEFSC-580) titled "Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury," and a placard titled "Handling/Release Guidelines," must be posted inside the wheelhouse.²³¹ These materials are available on the HMS Management Division website, or you can call (301) 427-8503 to request a waterproof copy.